

# Are Art Critics Guilty of Sex Discrimination?

June Wayne, noted Los Angeles painter and printmaker, is the founder of the Tamarind Lithography Workshop which has just published a special report on "Sex Differentials in Art Exhibition Reviews." Henry Seldis, Times art critic, comments.

BY JUNE WAYNE

• Every artist invited to Tamarind has been an exceptional professional. Yet more women artists than men turned down the opportunity to come to the workshop. Some asked for grants for artist husbands as a condition of acceptance—a condition we could not meet—but none of the men asked for grants for their artist wives.

Some women declined because their families couldn't spare them for two months, but no men refused their grants for family reasons. Only recently have women been accepting their grants without reference to domestic responsibilities, a trend directly traceable to the feminist movement.

Early on, another problem was noted: Most of the Tamarind women artists, although the aesthetic peers of the men, were getting fewer exhibitions and having fewer sales than were the men. "Sex Differentials in Art Exhibition Reviews: A Statistical Study," just published by Tamarind, sought to trace the source of these pressures on their careers. Without even considering content, what quantity of space can any artist, male or female, reasonably hope to receive for a solo show or for participa-

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BY HENRY J. SELDIS

• No one well acquainted with the contemporary art scene needed Tamarind's survey "Sex Differentials in Art Exhibition Reviews" to be aware that far more male than female artists are given exhibitions annually.

Nor can the seemingly objective matrix of statistical data hide the fact that June Wayne, whose own art and art directorial activities have had endless publicity—especially in this newspaper—was not to charge art critics with systematic sex discrimination.

Having gained national fame not only through her own creative talents but through the revival of lithography by her Ford Foundation-backed Tamarind Lithography Workshop, Ms. Wayne has battled for professionalism in art for 20 years. Yet nowhere in the extensive editorial comments on this statistical report do her employees touch on the differentiation between amateur and professional artists—be they male or female.

After first stating that the two art critics on this paper reviewed solo shows by 344 artists from June, 1970, to June, 1971, as compared to 238 artists reviewed by the New York Times

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tion in a group exhibition? To address these questions, a group of researchers under the joint direction of Betty Flake and Rosella Braeutigam totaled the listings, photos and many other details of art exhibition reviews in five national art magazines and four major newspapers plus Time and Newsweek. The 132 pages of data they generated, covering a statistically year starting with June of 1970, cannot be summarized in the space offered me here but, as a whole, the statistics reveal sharply less coverage of women artists than of men. The most possible coverage of any artist's solo show in New York is a six- to eight-line cryptic comment in an art magazine, but the women artists rarely move upward into articles as do the men. So systematic is their exclusion from articles about group exhibitions, and so rare are feature articles about a woman's solo exhibition, that access to the art market is seriously restricted for women.

Flake and Braeutigam tried to determine how many male/female artists were actually having shows during the same year. No reliable data were available. Exhibition listings and calendars were more impressive for institutions than for individuals. A much larger arts agency, like the National Endowment, is needed to study this, and many other questions left untouched by Tamarind's pilot probe into the relation between artists and the art press.

Nonetheless the study revealed an excellent control within its own data. One of the five art magazines consistently reviewed a much higher number of women than did the others. Writers cannot review what museums and galleries do not show, but obviously women's shows were there to be covered if



"Artists are every bit as newsworthy as the sexual athletes of football," says Ms. Wayne.

anyone wanted to find them.

Some writers, now aware of their myopia, are making an effort to redress the imbalance of the past, so women artists, like all minority artists, probably will receive somewhat more space in the future. But to say that is to say very little. What startled me about the Tamarind study was the minuscule total of listings devoted to all artists, male and female alike.

Combining the output devoted to ex-

hibition by living artists in Art in America, Arts Magazine, Art Forum, Craft Horizons and Art News, plus the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner and the San Francisco Chronicle, only 120,450 lines were available for the statistical period, of which 100,920 lines went to male artists.

Yet the greatly increased aesthetic activity in the studios deserves greatly increased attention which probably is

possible only by opening new channels to the public. The electronic media have been shockingly remiss. Every TV news team should have professional art reporters in the same sense that sports reporters are professionals.

Weekly openings of art exhibitions should be scanned by video news cameras to let the public see the shows as well as see the artists and hear them being interviewed. Artists are every bit as newsworthy as are the sexual athletes of football and film, and are much more celebrated for their comments. If only after they die, by the same writers that ignore their presence while they live.

A few national newspapers have one or more professional staff critics but their beat is always a megalopolis too big to cover either as art reporters or as critics. I have been told that for newspapers to give more space to art news, advertising revenues from art galleries must increase substantially.

But so long as art coverage is inadequate and appears for the most part in the belts of the women's pages (and other anachronism of these times) art advertisements reach a restricted "market" and gallery budgets produce more realistic results, dollar for dollar, when used in other ways.

But why should art coverage depend on advertising anyway? The public's "right to know" about artists is exactly as fundamental as its right to know about typhoons without regard to the number of ads for water wings. Does news of crime depend on ads for Mace?

The publishers and editors of art magazines and newspapers owe it to the public to correct the underexposure of living artists as well as the sex biases revealed by the Tamarind study. Should not the art press be as critical of its own performance as it expects us to be of our art?

# Critic Responds to the Report's Charges

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which employs four full-time critics and at least three more free-lance art writers. Ms. Wayne insists that "obviously women shows were there to be covered if anyone wanted to find them."

This was certainly not true for the geographical area that William Wilson and I try to cover each week. Unless, of course, Ms. Wayne expects us to regard every woman who puts brush to canvas or blowtorch to metal as a professional artist. This we are not prepared to do for either females or males.

The report deliberately ignored the fact that art coverage in newspapers or magazines can only mirror what happens in reputable galleries, museums and university art centers. What is reviewed simply reflects what is available. Art critics do not determine any community's art fare. Nor should they.

If the press covers fewer women than men shows, it is simply because there are fewer. Nor does the charge of sexual discrimination sit well with this particular critic, who decided over 10 years ago to call a woman artist's gallery show a "solo" show rather than to stick to the traditional "one-man show" designation.

We are all agreed that women artists deserve far wider exposure. Even as Tamarind researchers were laboriously measuring lineage and size of reproductions, the feminist movement was finding ready response in the art world so that if the study were to be repeated a year later its statistics would be far more favorable to women.

In discussing the report with a good number of women artists, I found that many would rather have a five-inch race review than negative criticism measuring four times as long.

"I believe women probably do suffer discrimination in our West Coast segment of the art world," Wilson told me after studying the report. "For as long as I have known you, we have deplored this circumstance. All of our sympathy, however, cannot create more exhibitions for gifted female artists."

Says New York Times art critic and art news editor Hilton Kramer: "Just ask Louise Nevelson whether I have ever been indifferent to the talents of contemporary women artists. I was the first to write about her and about all the other major women artists during the past 15 years."

Art News managing editor Elizabeth Baker insists that despite Tamarind's charges, "We covered every solo show

in New York that year, including all the women artists that were showing. There is some indication that galleries have long been discriminatory. It is a situation that all responsible art reviewers I know have not only been denouncing but protesting. Still it seems strange for June Wayne to bring these charges when so few women made it into her own Tamarind program."

Washington Post art writer Paul Richard points out that the Ford Foundation granted \$1.4 million in funds during the 10 years of the Wayne-founded Tamarind Lithography workshop.

During that time Richard says of the 107 artists given Tamarind grants, 89 (87.3%) were males; of the 57 guest artists invited to the workshop, only eight (14%) were women; of the 47 master printers trained at Tamarind, all were men; of the 29 print curators trained at Tamarind, only two (7%) were women.

"While I find the idea behind the Tamarind report basically sound, it ignored the fact that the funneling of art works is controlled by galleries and museums rather than the art press," says Art Forum editor John Copland. "Since I took over the editorship of

this magazine last year we have been making deliberate efforts to write about little known but highly professional women artists whether they happen to be having a show or not. But there is just no way of taking a democratic view of the art scene without giving up a standard of artistic quality which must be kept for the sake of all artists regardless of their sex."

Surely all artists in this, the second most active contemporary art scene in America, deserve far greater attention in the mass media. Art critics, reviewers and writers may have failed in convincing editors and publishers about the demonstrable growth of wide public interest in the visual arts. But they have never deliberately discriminated against artists on any grounds other than those of quality of artistic worth.

In these columns artists will continue to be judged on their merit rather than on their sex, color, religion or politics. I can readily join June Wayne's appeal for greater exposure of women artists' work and for wider coverage of the art world in general.

But I most determinedly reject her trumped-up charge, that critics systematically discriminate against women artists.